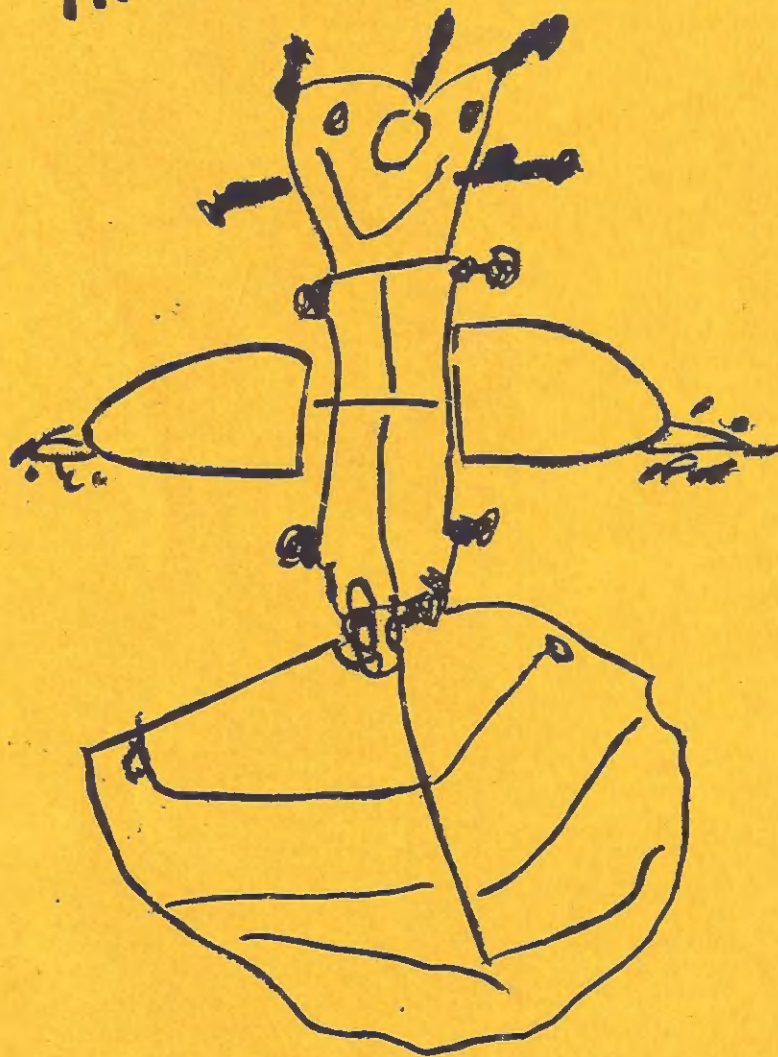


AS SOON AS YOU'RE BORN
THEY MAKE YOU FEEL SMALL



Self Determination for Children

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This pamphlet was originally written and produced in London, England in 1986. Some of the factual information is therefore out of date. It is part of an ongoing pre-occupation with children's oppression, starting from my own experience.

I would like to acknowledge the following who helped with the production: Margaret, Kate, Diane, Sarah,

Rachel and Sue.

Wendy Ayotte



"And those children that you spit on
As they try to change their world
Are immune to your consultation
They're quite aware of what they're
going through

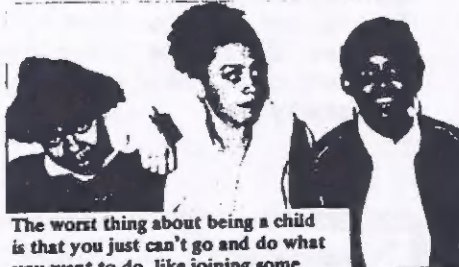
David Bowie

WHO IS A CHILD?

The word child usually means someone who has not yet reached puberty. In this pamphlet I'm using it to mean any one who is under 18 years of age and is therefore, legally considered to be a 'minor'. I use other words such as teenager, adolescent, young child, infant, baby and young person, both to refer to more specific age groupings and to add variety. Clearly there are significant differences between, for example, the experience of a young child and that of a teenager, which cannot all be explored in the space available. Age distinctions are also of great importance to children; the older you get the closer you are to being an adult, no longer 'just a child'. However, there are common experiences, problems and restrictions for all people under 18 years of age, which override the differences, since, in our culture, it is the division between adults and children which is at the heart of a society deeply divided by age.



I really look forward to growing up so I can go to parties and discos and things and get in late at night. It's silly not allowing children to swear, in fact adults sometimes swear at children because they've been swearing.



The worst thing about being a child is that you just can't go and do what you want to do, like joining some expedition. You always have to be over 18, it doesn't seem fair. And there are some jobs you don't need to learn lots of things for.

"As soon as you're born
They make you feel small"

John Lennon

"In the course of this life I have had a great many encounters with a great many people who have been concerned with matters of consequence. I have lived a great deal among grown-ups. I have seen them intimately, close at hand. And that hasn't much improved my opinion of them."

A. de Saint-Exupéry

IS IT ALWAYS LIKE THIS ?

There are and have been places in the world where children are not hit or threatened, where children are welcomed as new members of the community, where they have a place, not separate from, but integral to that community and where differences of size, experience and ability are not grounds for being powerless or unimportant.

Such places are not to be found in western industrial society but exist in the ever shrinking margins of what is called civilisation. They are the homes of people who we call 'primitives' and their way of life is under threat. The people of the Amazonian rain forests are one such example. Those of you who saw the film "The Emerald Rain Forest" will remember that these forests are being decimated in the interests of local elites and multinationals to make way for 'progress' like massive power dams.



The destruction of their home is being accompanied by enforced 'civilization' and all the benefits it brings: disease, alcoholism, poverty, foreign christian morality. Along with these comes acclimatisation to levels of violence hitherto unknown, let alone imagined, and the idea that wielding power-over-others is natural, human and inevitable. Such violence is internalised as well; self-repression and denial of the body are the other stigmas of civilisation, inseparable from the concepts of sin and guilt.

"When a child is 40 days old, there are more speeches, more promises on her/his behalf, and he becomes a full member of the community"

R. Menchú
a Guatemalan Indian Woman



In the 'secular' west we still behave very much in accordance with the christian idea that children are 'born in sin' and must be moulded and tamed into good citizens. If many of us no longer call it sin, it goes by other names like instinct which imply, that without adult discipline and instruction, children would be 'wild', selfish and anti-social. I began by referring to cultures where children are not perceived as 'demons' to be controlled, in order to raise some questions about children's status in this society.

"Violence is not an instinct. It isn't pressure that comes from within that has to be released. It is a cultural style."

J. Spiegel, Lemburg Centre for the Study of Violence.

Why are so many of adults efforts dictated towards control and punishment? Why are children so excluded from public places? Perceived as nuisances and burdens? Why do adults forget so much of the pain and humiliation they endured as children? Why are all the words associated with childhood and youth, negative in meaning, synonyms for incomplete, irrational, insignificant, simpleminded, selfish and so on? The phrase 'to be treated as a child' clearly means to be ignored, humiliated, patronised, to be seen as less of a person.

Children must learn 'restraint'

Young people should be taught the importance of restraint and respect for themselves and others in personal and sexual relationships, Mr Christopher Patten, Minister of State for Education and Science, said yesterday.

Why should children be denied the right to make choices simply because they might make mistakes? As adults, we pollute the environment, wage wars, create nuclear weapons, and stockpile mountains of food in Europe while people in Africa die in their tens of thousands, hardly the hallmark of rational decision makers. To allow adults, but not children, to make mistakes is hypocrisy. Why not allow children to learn from mistakes and so grow in experience and knowledge?

For those who are inside a culture, brought up to accept its ways, as natural and proper, it is very difficult to imagine ways in which it might or should be different. When white Europeans came to North America, the indigenous people often thought that white parents did not love or value their children because they hit and beat them. In the near annihilation of the Native culture which followed the 'discovery' of the continent, this perspective has been lost: both that of the outsider looking in and that of a culture which does not employ coercion and violence towards children.

"Perhaps the most distressing to the tribes were calculated efforts to turn their children from the traditional ways. These efforts were called "educating the children for citizenship." The children were forcibly taken to far places where many sickened and died, or committed suicide, or ran away places where their pride was cruelly broken on inflexible rules and alien standards."

F. Turner
on Native Americans

WHAT KIDS SAY ISN'T IMPORTANT
Scott

POLLY

Just because their mother and father treated them like slaves parents make life harder for us, since they had to bear it themselves. So the Prime Minister makes things worse for children because he doesn't have to be a child any more. It's silly that there are things that 10 or 11 year olds can't see because they're going to have to see them sometime.

"I was told of a boy who, until he was almost four years old, thought that his name was 'Shut-up'." —Shulamith Firestone, in *The Dialectics of Sex*



Although this pamphlet is about childhood in the west, I will be drawing on material from non western countries in order to point to ways in which childhood can be/is different and to undermine ideas about its 'naturalness'.

It has become cliché to remark on the level of violence in society, in all areas. During the last year in Britain the media has focused on the deaths of many children ranging in age from a few months to their teens. Some were kidnapped, abused and murdered by strangers, while others and this is by far the greater number, died at the hands of their parents or 'carers' (the NSPCC estimates as many as 3 children die weekly within the family). Several boys have recently committed suicide while confined to borstals practising the 'short, sharp, shock' treatment. Corporal punishment is still used in many British schools; STOPP, the organisation committed to abolishing it, has recorded many instances of serious assaults on pupils by teachers.

While children's and teenagers' sexuality is closely regulated, often forbidden and repressed, adult men consume vast amounts of child pornography. The profits from this amount to at least 40% of the total for the entire industry. The numbers of children exploited in the production of pornography - films, videos, pictures - is vast, amounting to at least two million + children per year.

While those 21 and under are excluded from wage councils and working minors are not protected by minimum wage legislation, many employers prefer to hire young people at pay levels on a par with pocket money, rather than salaries. Is it surprising then that more and more young people turn to prostitution? Many of those who have been abused and humiliated at home or 'in care' are to be found surviving this way in the streets.

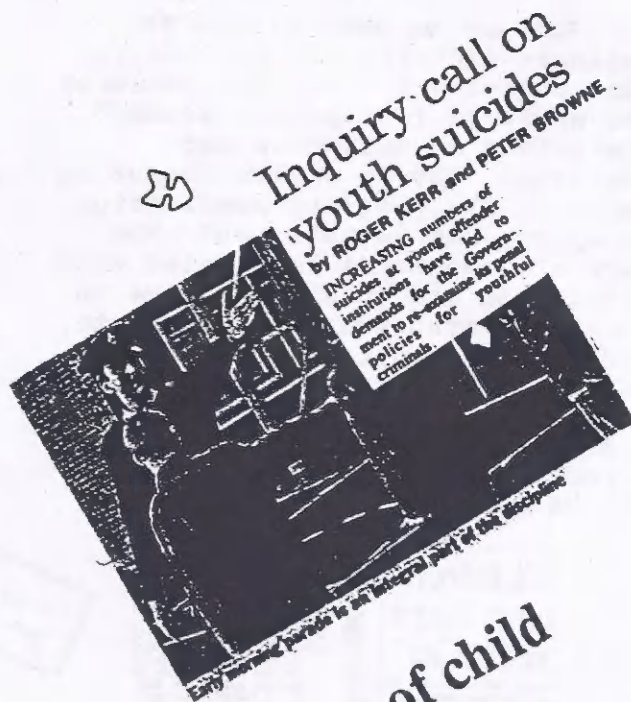
Under-21s excluded

By Jane McLoughlin

IN LINE with its general policy that market forces should rule, the Government is to change the wages council system to exclude under-21s.

Dying for a job

In the last four years 23 young people have been killed and 100 suffered amputations while on government youth training schemes. Quentin McDermott looks at the shocking cost of cheap labour



Inquiry call on youth suicides

by ROGER KERR and PETER BROWNE
INCREASING numbers of suicides at young offenders' institutions have led to demands for the Government to re-examine its penal policies for youthful criminals.

Early morning parade is an integral part of the discipline

The cruel facts of child abuse in Britain

It is still possible to believe that crimes against children are aberrations and name the 'villains': psychotic monsters, 'subnormal' or deprived parents, perverse teachers and youth workers, lazy social workers, unscrupulous profiteers. By marginalizing the evil ones, adults protect themselves from uncomfortable questions and memories, refuse to see the connections between these crimes and the general condition of all children's lives. After all, isn't this a 'child-centred', 'permissive' society? Aren't western children the best fed and housed, with access to the best educational opportunities and health care?

Whether you think these statements are true or not, they do not necessarily mean that our culture likes or respects children, nor that children are content or happy within the environment constructed 'for' them.

Any day of the week it is possible to see children being threatened, slapped, insulted, dragged along, pushed resisting into pushchairs, handled like cute dolls or talked about in their presence as though they didn't exist or didn't have feelings. Often there are signs in shops excluding school children and they are generally barred from places where alcohol is sold. It is an unspoken assumption that children can be ignored and overruled, that they should give way, that adults have priority.

It is useful to compare the interactions between adults, to those between children and adults. Adults talk with each other, in ways which usually involve respect, equality, being taken seriously. An adult talking with a child is more likely talking at or down to her/him, and their voice will often assume a patronising or authoritarian tone. Children in the presence of adults can be ignored, told to stop interfering. Children who talk back or just want to engage on an equal level are cheeky, rude, disobedient.



If you believe as I do, that it is the experience of childhood which shape and limit an individual in decisive ways, then many things are seriously wrong with children's lives today. We all have our first encounter with the world as children yet, for so many adults their childhood experience is vague and piecemeal, summed up by general statements such as a 'happy' or 'deprived' childhood, as though the experience could be categorised and put away. The complexity of feeling and experience is reduced to pat phrases. The first five years is all but lost to memory: a few fragments remain, elusive and shadowy like dreams.



If adults are willing to look at what actually happens to children rather than what is *said* about them: the way they are treated without respect, the expectations that they be obedient, good, manageable, the degrading stereotypes of children which are reflected in language, images, in toys and entertainment - they will find a childhood which is neither 'carefree' nor 'joyful', but rife with humiliations, lack of recognition and the suppression of creative and sensual drives. If adults were willing to listen to the criticisms, objections and opinions of children, or to their very telling silences, might they not find echoes of their own 'lost years'?



And for children, it is perhaps more difficult to question the edifice of childhood; as children, we are painfully dependent on adults and have integrated the values of being good, obedient and child-like. It is so often the only path to approval and survival.

But resistance does occur in small, invisible ways and often collectively, visibly. Such resistances are renamed delinquency, hyper-activity, naughtiness, deviancy; children are sometimes subjected to 'treatment' and punishment for these 'disorders'. These renamings need not blind us, if adults are attentive to both the child within them and to the voices of children everywhere.

tone of voice

► GIRLS AND BOYS

This pamphlet is addressing the experience of childhood, shared by both sexes in western society. All cultures create distinctions between girls and boys, in addition to the purely biological. Thus they have different and shared experiences. The degree and importance of gender-based differences varies enormously amongst cultures and races, in addition to economic systems, family structures and so on. In the west, expectations of what a girl and a boy 'should' be are distinguished according to the prevailing notions of femininity and masculinity.

Feminism has addressed the problem of sexual stereotyping, particularly how it affects girls, by limiting the scope of their activities and potential and encouraging them to behave in 'feminine' ways which undermine their self confidence. Boys are incited to be competitive, aggressive, and to pursue 'masculine' interests. They should repress feelings of hurt, fear and tenderness and despise behaviour which is identified as feminine.



Preparing
to be a
Beautiful
Lady

Yes—we've caught Christine at her favourite job! Helping Mummy is great fun even though she gets a little in the way sometimes: it's good training for Christine too. Mummy's "beauty training" for Christine is even more simple—just Pears Soap and clear water, which are surely "Preparing her to be a Beautiful Lady."

PEARS SOAP



"I guess it takes a few more years before they find out they're the weaker sex!"

'Girls are
conditioned'
to fail
at maths

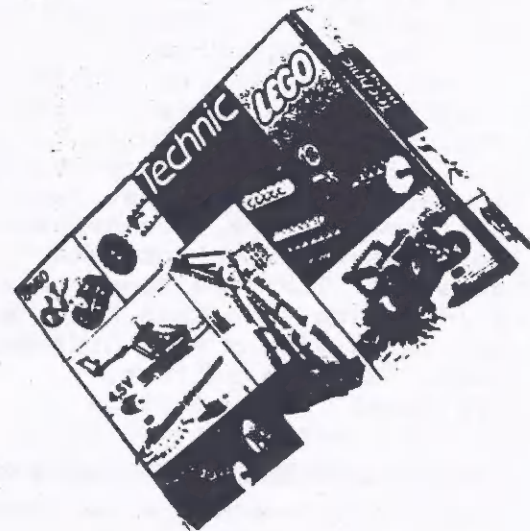
Not only do individual boys and girls suffer from these pressures, but relationships between girls and boys are adversely affected. Sexual stereotyping is also essential to the future positions children will take up as adults in a male dominated society.

Thus an awareness of gender differentiation is crucial and positive, when it has an enabling effect i.e. by encouraging children to challenge and step out of the roles prescribed for them. The danger, which is true of all approaches, if they become pedagogical, is that they will perpetuate adult needs to mould children. Thus, without a general understanding of the common oppression which girls and boys suffer, anti-sexist approaches can be seriously flawed.

» WHAT'S IN A THEORY?



When i began writing this pamphlet, i assumed that the ideal starting point for each reader would be their own experience of childhood. This has been my own starting point. I have no desire to impose my own 'theory of childhood' on individual experience. When faced with generalisations, we may reject them out of a legitimate fear of being 'slotted into' a framework, that our individual experience will be denied validity. Since this is one of the common experiences of childhood ,it would be rather ironic if i were



to construct a single correct version of western childhood.

Each of us have unique experiences distinguished by gender, race, class, ability, culture, family, sexual orientation and so much more. These are the other components of identity and experience which influence each person's childhood. I have titled the following sections the 'tool box', in the hope that it will be both versatile and usable. The tools are the elements which comprise the overall portrait of childhood. These elements can never be pieced together into a coherent and tidy whole because reality is not like that ;it varies from moment to moment, from person to person. This is not meant to deny the existence of a system of childhood, which is maintained by legal, social and economic means, as well as by adult chauvinism. It *should* be possible to seek out common ground, based on a recognition of difference.



» Adult-Child

PAUL'S GOSPEL

It is commonly held that when a person becomes a adult, they must "put away childish things" as did Saint Paul when he "became a man". Graduating into adulthood implies, on the one hand, the assumption of a set of characteristics which are not manifested in childhood and, on the other, a rejection of behaviour and desires thought to be childish i.e. undesirable. The ideal adult is responsible, consistent, rational, controlled, mature, aware of others. They are providers, carers, breadwinners. They possess experience and foresight. They are independent. Children, on the other hand, are associated with a very different image; they are selfish, irrational, irresponsible, immature, dependent and needy.

By the time they enter adolescence and youth....Mbuti children have learned the major values that mitigate against aggressivity and violence....They carry these values with them throughout life, they do not put away childish things"

Turnbull.

Roget's thesaurus cites the following synonyms (words with a similar meaning) for infant, child, youth etc.: ignorant, incomplete, defective, senile, backward, callow, credulous, unsophisticated, simple-minded, unimportant, trifling and naive. The only positive quality listed was trusting i.e. being without suspicion. Skill and intelligence are referred to as exceptional eg. child prodigy, gifted child.

The word youngster had the following associations: 1) young animals eg. puppy 2) smallness, littleness 3) expressions like urchin, brat, little bugger, spoiled, holy terror 4) sexual references to girls: nymphet, virgin, piece, hoyden 5) outsey words like darling, cherub.

SOGAT • AUEW • NUJ • NGA



My Dad wants to work but Mr Murdoch sacked him.

5,000 families like Emma's have now lost their breadwinners

THEY NEED YOUR SUPPORT

DON'T BUY THE Sun NEWS OF THE WORLD

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Kohl throws a party to show love of children

From Anna Tomforde in Bonn

Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the father of two sons, on their 26's, yesterday introduced a new element to Bonn's political life by inviting more than 700 children to the Chancellery for a garden party with merry-go-rounds, sausages, and plenty of ice cream.

The 55-year-old Chancellor, surrounded by Mickey Mouse balloons, used the five-hour party in his office garden to demonstrate that, despite gloomy polls and statistics, West German society was not hostile to children.

Perhaps dictionary references wouldn't be so significant if every-day language didn't reaffirm them: "don't be so childish", "don't treat me like a child", "how juvenile", "why don't you grow up" etc. To be called childish or adolescent is humiliating and insulting, not only for adults; children also refer to those younger than themselves as "only babies", "just kids". And it is not only verbally that children are portrayed as lacking and insignificant. Visual media and advertising continually project images of children as cute playthings, not to be taken seriously. Political parties, of all colours, exploit the so called needs of children whom they portray as weak, helpless and in need of their intervention. Just look around: t.v, billboards, film, advertising, newspapers. Where can we see children portrayed as strong, resourceful, caring or intelligent?

OPPOSITES

The images of child and adult are polar opposites. Where children lack, adults possess; where children ~~are~~ mere trifles, adults ~~are~~ significant. Like all oppositions, ~~one~~ does not exist without the other. The concept of femininity doesn't stand by itself; it immediately conjures up that of masculinity; within it is contained the idea of its opposite.

So it is with child and adult. Like all oppositions, which only make sense together, they suggest ~~a~~ totality, ~~a~~ unity, which in this case is to be found in the individual. The child becomes the adult; the adult as the child. Together they form ~~a~~ whole human being. Yet what of the rupture, the 'putting away of childish things'? How can this be explained? Quite simply by showing it to be, in part, ~~a~~ deception, but one which is constantly reproduced by a social ordering, which maintains separation according to age and adult domination.

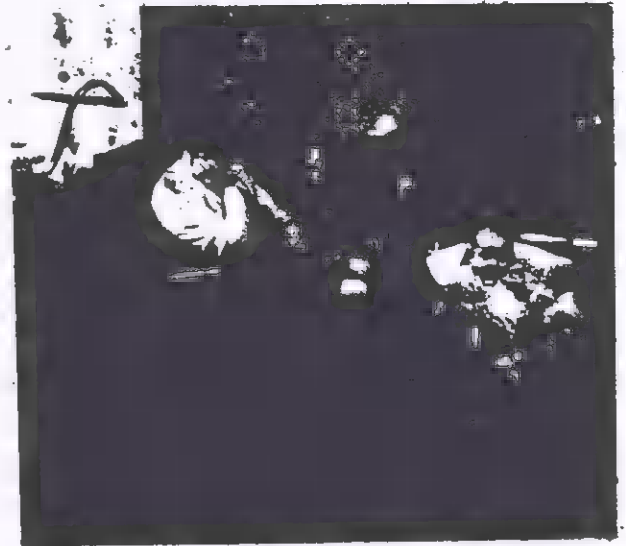
The distinctions between adults and children are misleading in so far as they are seen as fixed, as equivalent to ~~a~~ sense of self. The pride of place which our culture grants adults (except the elderly who are often treated like children) is only maintained by the *infantilisation* of children, by the constant insistence that children be something *other* than adults (and vice versa). Children are the absence, the invisible prop which constantly reaffirms the substance of adulthood.

This is not to say that it is necessary for adults and children to be *physically* together for this to be true. It is to the *idea* of the child and the *idea* of the adult that I refer, and these are constantly promoted in our culture. Neither am I saying that real adults and children are co-terminous with these ideas, but rather they are symbolic reference points which in part reflect, and in part determine behaviour and real experience.

CONTINUED

It's right that there are some things children can't do, like drink and drive cars, because if you got killed you would only have had a short life. But we ought to be able to watch 'Saturday Night Fever' which only has an adult certificate because of the bad language, which is mostly used by children anyway.

I suppose if you let kids do what they wanted you wouldn't be able to control them - they'd just grow.



"DON'T FEEL LIKE AN ADULT"

In conversation, numerous adults have told me they don't 'feel like adults' all the time. At times they experience feelings of helplessness and humiliation which evoke past childhood experiences, and are in contradiction to the 'persona' of the in-control adult. This is interesting to me, because it suggests the realm of the unconscious.

We know that parts of our mental life are normally inaccessible to us. We become aware of the existence of such an unconscious place via dreams and the emerging into consciousness of desires and motivations hitherto inaccessible to us. The existence of this unconscious means that much of what ~~we~~ call the personality is influenced by experiences and needs of which ~~we~~ are unaware, and which stretch back to the very beginning of our individual histories. Thus our 'child' experience lives on, (as does last year's and yesterday's).

Not only does the unconscious obscure the dividing line between the child and the adult selves, but it throws into doubt notions of a fixed identity. The adults who often feel like children or 'the child, 'mature beyond their years' are not maladjusted: they are simply demonstrating the fluidity of human identity. While it is true that adult persons, in our culture, *must* take up the social position or role of adult (unless age or illness is used to infantilise them) this is nonetheless a *limited* truth because individual human subjects never correspond to the category of adult.

Even though the 'child' experience which adults carry within them, is normally censored out, denied, there are points when they are 'allowed' to emerge. Under the influence of alcohol for instance, or in an intimate relationship (where adults can 'baby' one another!). Thus we have on the one hand a social ordering, determined by age, which prescribes fixed places to both adults and children and, on the other, a sense of self which shifts and changes depending on the circumstances.



OLD FOR YOUR AGE

While it remains the case that people below a certain age *must* take up a child's position (i.e. they are legal minors, subject to parental authority, obliged to attend school etc) which is socially inferior, children often



exhibit 'adult' qualities of strength, altruism, independence, and caring. This can be seen in numerous situations - rendered invisible or rejected as 'unsuitable' - as when children care for other children, or provide understanding and tolerance for needy adults, or manage on their own.

Of course different criteria and expectations come into play to assess child and adult behaviour; the adult who behaves 'childishly' is seen as failing, inadequate. 'Childish' serves as an incitement to reassume control, to contain the undesirable emotions.

Children who behave older than their years are seen as overly serious, precocious or 'deprived' of the irresponsibility which is supposed to be the 'right' of childhood. Or they can be accused of cheekiness, arrogance and put in their place. In this way children are pressed into age-appropriate behaviour. Is it not threatening to see children behave in ways which connote powerfulness, so embedded in our culture is the idea of their powerlessness?

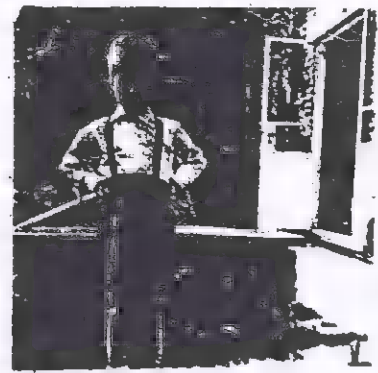
You may now say "But children and adults are different and there are qualities which are valued in children". Both these are true. Amongst the identifiable differences are the critical dependency of babies who alone could not survive, the physical transformations of puberty, the relative lack of experience in many areas. Yet even these differences are by no means absolute. They are critically affected by the environment and assume varying significance.

I have known babies capable of entertaining themselves for long periods and those who could not be alone at all, without anxiety. Amongst some African nomadic tribes children walk at 7 months old while in the west the 'norm' is one year or more. In Bogota, Columbia thousands of children survive in groups without adults, while in the west even a 15 year old is not legally entitled to live independently, outside of the family or state institutions.

Clearly differences are relative and difference is a fact of life, be it based on age, gender, class, race or whatever. The critical question is how are certain differences used to construct and rationalise social inequality. It is not evident to me that differences in size and experience justify children's inferior status.



The positive qualities, which children allegedly possess include spontaneity, abundance of energy, physicality, lack of self-consciousness, being forgiving and open



Monday 24th July 1972

mummy's gone to Cambridge.
Don't miss her. Another tiring day.
Felt like a real mother. Feel nervous of mummy.

Kate's Diary.

Yet many children, even at an early age, are repressed, inhibited and wary, and in practice adults often don't appreciate the positive qualities. They say children are noisy, too boisterous and pose awkward questions. Nonetheless, why is this set of characteristics seen as incompatible with adulthood? Why are they threatening?

Many cultures build on the strengths and attributes of each successive period of life. For them, 'putting away childish things' would be anti-social, as it would be for the elderly to be devalued and cast aside. The elderly in western society are treated similarly to children: patronised, marginalised in 'homes', seen as intellectually deficient and burdensome, their feelings and opinions not to be taken seriously. Their skills, experience and knowledge of the past afford them no privilege.

By putting into question the categories adult and child we would open up new possibilities for each of us. If we accept that human characteristics cannot be ordered via age and that human identity is far more fluid and variable then the categories admit, we need to look at what maintains the social ordering of age. Difference need neither be denied or used as a prop for inequality.

GHETTO - IZED

GETTING AROUND

Our physical environment is constructed, by and large, to meet the needs of the 'average' sized, able-bodied adult (usually male). Those who are elderly, disabled, or considerably slower, shorter, less strong than this 'average', experience, to varying degrees, problems of mobility, access and usage.

Children, and particularly small children experience all of these. Urban centres, where most of us live, are dominated by traffic which makes it impossible for young children to go outside in the street, unaccompanied, and dangerous for older ones who often have no other place to play and congregate. Use of buses and underground is restrictive because of the size of steps, the height of ticket counters, and the crush of crowds in rush hours.

If there is no garden where a small child lives, then she/he is a prisoner inside, unless an adult takes her/him out. It is the way transport and cities are organised which forces children to depend unduly on adults, in order to get around, not some inherent attribute of children to travel known routes.

MADE TO WHOSE MEASURE?



Access problems are numerous for pre-adolescent children. Were children permitted or able to get around in public, they would find the counter heights of most service points a problem: in post offices, bars, banks, self-service restaurants, supermarkets. Or when purchasing goods, many would be out of reach. Toilets and sinks in public places are adult size. In cinemas and theatres, no

provision is made for those whose vision is blocked by those of 'average' height.

At home the problems continue. In the kitchen the counters, cupboards, stove and fridge are all too tall. For children interested in cooking this is discouraging. Even where they are permitted to cook, standing on chairs is precarious and inadequate. As well, baths, toilets and sinks are problematic as is the height of light switches, window latches and most shelving. Furnishings, especially tables and chairs, are extremely frustrating. Both at home and in public, little if any provision is made for small people,

Size is also a factor in the use of tools and implements. These again are designed for use by 'Ms/Mr Average'. They include kitchen utensils and pots, household appliances, tools for all manual skills, for gardening, for bicycle repairs and so on. It is, for example, practically impossible to find a hammer which is the correct size and weight for a child who is under 10 years of age. The hammers and other 'tools' made for children are flimsy, ineffectual and not heavy enough.

Clearly, like most toys, they were never meant for 'practical use'. If a hammer is so hard to find, then anything more complex is in the realm of the impossible, unless of course, adults decide that children need a certain item. This is the case with violins which can be purchased as small as 1/16 of the 'normal' size. But then of course, it also takes money to buy one...

"After receiving money from both of her parents she wrote 'It was my wit that gained me this money for I wrote verses to them both'"

Elizabeth Wynnes Diary 1791

MONEY

Having money is necessary in order to participate in most social activities. Going to restaurants, movies, musical events and many sporting facilities all require cash, not to mention paying for transportation. For young people who can get about by themselves, their options are severely limited by lack of money. Teenagers congregate in shopping malls, on street corners and arcades because these are their options.

Stores which prohibit access to children or limit their numbers at any given time, do so, presumably because children have a reputation as shoplifters. This isn't surprising, given their limited access to money. As well, the desirability of material goods is incessantly promoted by all the medias; acquiring possessions holds out the 'promise' of happiness, status and success. But, the fact is, all age groups shoplift; only children are singled out. If there were a bill of rights in this country, such bigotry could be legally contested, providing of course, that age were included as a category of discrimination.

Although it is just such impediments which prevent children from doing a variety of things for themselves, from being more independent, this is not how it is understood. Reality is inverted; it is children who are incapable and unskilled. Then the assumption is realised since, having little or no opportunity to acquire skills and independence, children become incapable and must constantly turn to adults when they want things done, when they need money.

The marvellous potential to absorb information and master skills which young people exhibit is wasted. Adults get irritated, feel trapped and burdened by demands. Children develop ways to get what they want: whining, cajoling, crying, manipulating, etc. This is the inevitable lot of those whose access to the world is mediated by another.



Grocer kills three boys suspected of stealing

From Jane [redacted]
in New York

The proprietor of a Brooklyn grocery store shot four black teenagers, killing three of them, reportedly because he thought one boy was trying to steal a 25-cent bottle of soda.

Late Wednesday night, two boys entered the little neighbourhood store in a low income, mainly black Brooklyn neighbourhood and one of them took the soda bottle from a shelf and then dropped it by mistake.

The proprietor, a 27-year-old Arab immigrant from Yemen, demanded payment, the boy said he was not to blame for breaking the bottle. A shouting match began and the proprietor pulled a gun, shot both boys, and then fired at two other boys who happened to be in the store at the time.

When police arrived, two of the boys were already dead, the third died in hospital a

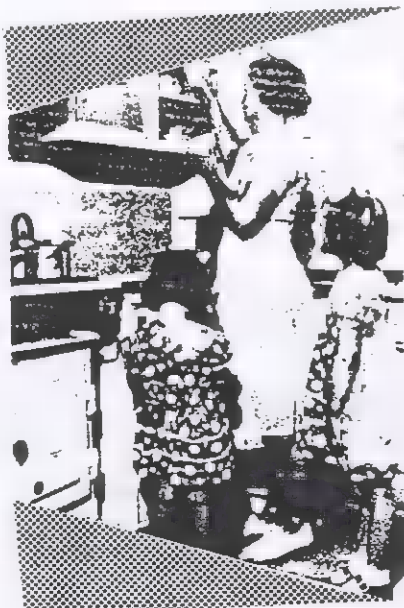
few hours later. The [redacted] is [redacted] in hospital with a gunshot wound in his left eye. The [redacted] between 14 and 15 years old.

News of the shootings spread and an angry crowd surrounded the store, throwing stones through the windows until police came.

Although, at first, there were comparisons to the so-called "subway avenger," Bernhard Goetz, who is awaiting trial for shooting four youths who allegedly accosted him, police say the case is very different.

In contrast with the Goetz case, a policeman said yesterday, "nobody was threatening the Brooklyn proprietor."

"Maybe he was thinking of Bernie Goetz, but nobody was attempting to rob him, and the boys evidently weren't even carrying weapons. The proprietor just seemed to go berserk."



provide
opportunities
to young
people
independence

» Authority and Control

PARENT POWER

The word 'authority' may well have its origins in procreation. It derives from the word "author" which means, amongst other things, the person who "originates or gives existence to anything", "she/he who authorises or instigates", "one who begets, ■ father or ancestor" (Oxford English Dictionary). From this we can see that authority meaning "the power to enforce obedience, the right to command, delegated power", reposes in persons who act, initiate, procreate.

So it is that the parent-child relationship is ■■ of the few, if only, areas where authority is still considered to be 'natural' and not contractual. To give life to a new human being also confers considerable power over them. This is confirmed, both legally and socially, as being just and proper. Children are effectively their parent's possessions until they reach majority.

The potential power of parents includes: determining where children live, what they eat, what they wear, their general appearance, choice of schools, where children go outside of school. They can punish physically, verbally, by withdrawal of privileges, or confinement in bedrooms. They determine pocket money, usually as ■ favour, and can control moneys which children earn or inherit. They can infringe on children's privacy, prohibit friendships and sexual experience.



Brazilians held over baby-sale plot



They can prevent children living elsewhere, and get the police to bring them back, if they run away. They can label children ■■ delinquents or problem children and force psychiatric or therapeutic 'solutions', or confinement in children's "homes". They can foster out when they can't cope and take children back when they feel ready, even after years of absence.

When ■ runaway child goes to a sympathetic adult, that adult can be charged with kidnapping. Children who run away from home and refuse the punitive alternative of childrens homes are forced to live on the streets, where they can be victimised by an array of other exploitative adults. Many of these children end up addicted to drugs or dead, yet it is *illegal* for them to seek out someone they trust.

Unnecessary force — prosecution

**P-c grabbed
and kicked
me, says boy**



STATE INTERVENTION

Parental authority is also transfereable to guardians, teachers, and in the case of state intervention, to the courts and their agents, eg. social workers. Although it is in a sense true that the welfare state weakens parental authority, it can also be seen as an extension of it. The state intervenes when parental authority is seen to break down or be inadequate, or when parental care is thought to be lacking. Thus welfare institutions provide continuity and validation for the idea of authority. Since care is perceived as 'knowing what is best for children' or 'acting in their best interests,' it is not incompatible with authority.

Furthermore, state intervention is normally more systematic and total. The levels of surveillance, in children's homes far exceed those possible within the family. Children who are placed in homes because of parental violence or neglect, are in effect punished for their own victimisation. Victims of sexual abuse by fathers, usually girls, are regularly removed from their homes and placed in institutions.

ADOPTIVE PARENT WANTED FOR JOHN

John's problem is that people find it very hard that he has any problems. He is fair haired, blue eyed, ominently appealing 7 year old who tugs at adults' heart strings with his winning ways. Sadly John never had the close relationship as a baby that would have enabled him to feel and get close to people. It is going to be very hard work indeed to break through and behind the masks that John puts on for the world.

John fits quite easily into life in a children's home, he is happy in a crowd because he can hide and control his destiny to a large extent, it is in families that John gets pressurised because people make emotional demands that he cannot meet. John has learnt wonderful skills to keep people away, he smiles and makes cute comments or finds people's most sensitive spots... and then scratches hard.

John is not a monster, just a little boy who is terrified that people will get close enough to see all the badness he believes is inside. Moreover, John has learnt that he can outwit adults, even if they start off full of love and good intentions.

Two families already have found John was stronger than them so he knows how powerful he is. John needs one parent who is prepared to spend a couple of years battling to love him despite all the hate he will draw forth from them. Eventually he believes when John has done his utmost and found that he is still not rejected might learn to love in return.

John's homefinding social worker will be demanding too. She will put a new parent through a very thorough training programme and will be a frequent visitor after John is placed. Are you up to the challenge of John?

Proposal to end short, sharp shock regimes

Putting young offenders away 'increases crime'

"Parental discipline is the gateway to knowledge."—Spiro T. Agnew

OBEDIENCE

Obedience is the flip side of authority, its complement. Obedience is what is expected from children. In no other inter-human relationship is this assumption so uncontested. The 'good' child means the compliant and obliging one. Thus, virtue for children is linked to obedience rather than active qualities such as initiative or compassion.

This early training continues to be of relevance in later years, and may explain why adults themselves are obedient in the face of a multitude of authority figures. Obedience is not an act to be shrugged off, but a state of mind. It serves to invalidate individual desires and opinions, and to generate guilt. As well it arouses the fear that we might lose the love and approval of those we love and on whom we depend. As children we internalise the values of adult figures and these remain with us.

When adults speak of the "need for discipline" their voices often seem to be coming from somewhere else. When asked why discipline is so necessary they give cliché responses like "children would run wild" or "they must respect their elders".

"If an adult has not developed a mind of his own, then he will find himself at the mercy of the authorities for better or worse, just as an infant finds itself at the mercy of its parents. Saying no to those more powerful will always seem too threatening to him."

A. Miller

SELF REGULATION

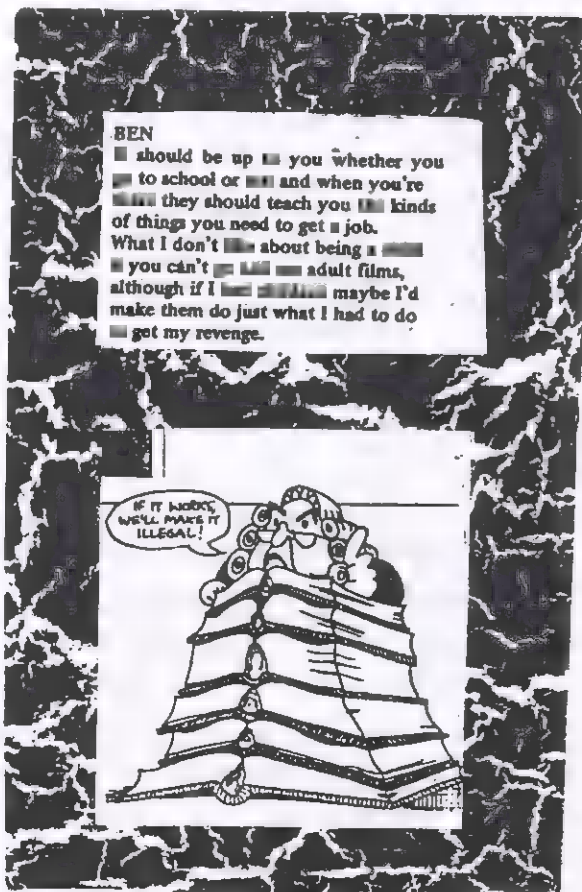
While it's true that children who are normally under adult control and have no experience of selfregulation, often run wild without concern for others, what of adults who also 'let loose'? Alcohol, sex, drugs and sports are all ways in which adults can *permissably* be self-indulgent, even anti-social. Might not these voices be those of their *own* parents who are invoked to justify their current exercise of authority, as well as their own childhood experience? After all, adults have all been children; questioning the naturalness of adult power questions not only their present status ■■ adults, but their view of their own past.

Most adults are still trying in ■■■ way or another to please their own parents, some of which takes the form of identifacation with them. This can effectively silence forever, the legitimate voice of the chid within them. It would appear that adults themselves are still afraid of being bad.

The Government's radical review of child ~~care~~ promises new rights for parents and children too. David Hencke reports

**Prevention
is better
than care**

**Children's lives v
parents' liberty**



LEGITIMATE VIOLENCE

A child is being hit, insulted or dragged along in public. No one intervenes. Such assault is legal, so long as it is 'within reason'. It is in such situations that the condition of children ■■ property and the power of adults stand out in stark relief. To treat another adult this way would be ■ criminal offence. It is in public that the privatised nature of children's lives is accentuated. They have no public identity since they are either directly under an adult's control, or assumed to be temporarily removed from it, eg. school children at lunch time. The family, the school, the playground, the youth club; these are the places where children belong.

The family is meant to be a kind of sanctuary from the world, yet the statistics on violence within the family tell a different story.

It would seem that too much is expected from the nuclear family; small and isolated, it is nonetheless, expected to provide for the emotional and sexual needs of its members as well as the necessities i.e. food, shelter etc. Within the family adults can and do control children via a range of emotional, physical, economic and sexual coercions. The intervention of state protectors in extreme cases and the very category of abuse itself as exceptional or distinct, camouflages the abusive nature of adult power.

In other areas of life this power can be named: tyrannical, arbitrary, manipulative. Yet often hear children described as tyrants and manipulators. Is it really possible to believe that a child, dependent in so many ways on adults can in fact tyrannise them? Children appear to get what they want by manipulating their subordinate status eg by tantrums and rebellion. But they usually pay for these 'victories' by feeling guilty or suffering adult resentment.

Don't Interrupt!

Turn television down!
None of your cheek!
Down!
Shut up!
Don't make a fool of yourself!
Respect your elders!
I can't put up with you anymore!
Go outside.
Don't walk so fast!
Don't run.
Don't forget to brush your teeth!
Don't forget to polish your shoes!
Don't touch the door!
Keep your manners!
Don't interrupt when I'm talking!
Put your hand over your mouth when you cough.
Don't talk with your mouth full!
Go to market with me.
You spend too much money!
No more pocket money for you dear.
Go to your room!
Don't stuff yourself with sweets!
Don't point!
Don't touch the television.
You are not coming out until you have tidied your room!
Don't interrupt when I'm talking!
Did you get any homework today?
Always carry a book to school.
Eat your dinner up.
Wear your school uniform!
Turn the television over to watch 'Dallas'.
Bring any letters home from school.
Come straight home tomorrow.
Tidy your bed.
Don't shout!
Don't listen to my conversation.
Don't look at the sun it could blind you.
Don't bite your nails!
Don't suck your thumb!
Why don't you love me!
You never listen to a word I say!
Don't interrupt when I'm talking!

Demetroulla Vassili

THE PRICE OF 'RESPECT'

To whom can children speak of their pain and suffering, when everything legitimates adult authority, and they fear the loss of adult love and approval? Children not only tolerate an enormous amount from adults, but often assume the blame for their own victimisation. In such a state of isolation they become cut off from feelings of rage, hurt and humiliation. Later as adults they may remember the mistreatment, but are incapable of invoking the feelings.

Thus many adults can laughingly recall incidents which were anything but funny. This doesn't mean that the hurt feelings have vanished; on the contrary, they surface in the need to control and punish children, in a vain attempt to compensate. Children must respect adults, regardless, because adults were not respected as children.



DEPENDENCY

MINORITY STATUS

All people under 18 are legal minors. The term itself is an apt description of children's status, meaning "the lesser of two things, species etc.; comparatively small or unimportant; not to be reckoned amongst the greater or principal individuals of the kind." Being a minor is being less of a person, since you are deprived of a variety of rights and freedoms which are available to major persons.

You cannot live where you want or without parent/guardian; you cannot enter into legal contracts or vote. You cannot hold public office or be protected by minimum wage laws. Under sixteen you cannot work full time, drive or drink, marry, leave school, attend certain films or engage in heterosexual relations. The age of consent for homosexuality is 21. Lesbianism is not subject to legislation under British law.

A minor can be legally assaulted by parents, guardians and teachers. The power of parents can extend, as previously mentioned into a variety of non legal areas like appearance, friendships, privacy, daily decision making and so on. The sum total of these sanctions result in incredibly galling and artificial limitations for minors, particularly teenagers, and heavy responsibilities for adults.

In theory minors are 'not responsible', although they they can be held criminally responsible at 10, and should they fall foul of adults, they can be subjected to long spells of incarceration in borstals, homes and psychiatric units. Becoming pregnant, being an incest victim or battered child, skipping school, running away, lesbianism/homosexuality are some of the many reasons why minors are institutionalised. These are heavy prices to pay for one's 'lack of responsibility'.

Shortly after presentation to the camp the child is given a first name decided on by family and friends together from the moment of naming onward, the child is treated as a full person with individual rights.

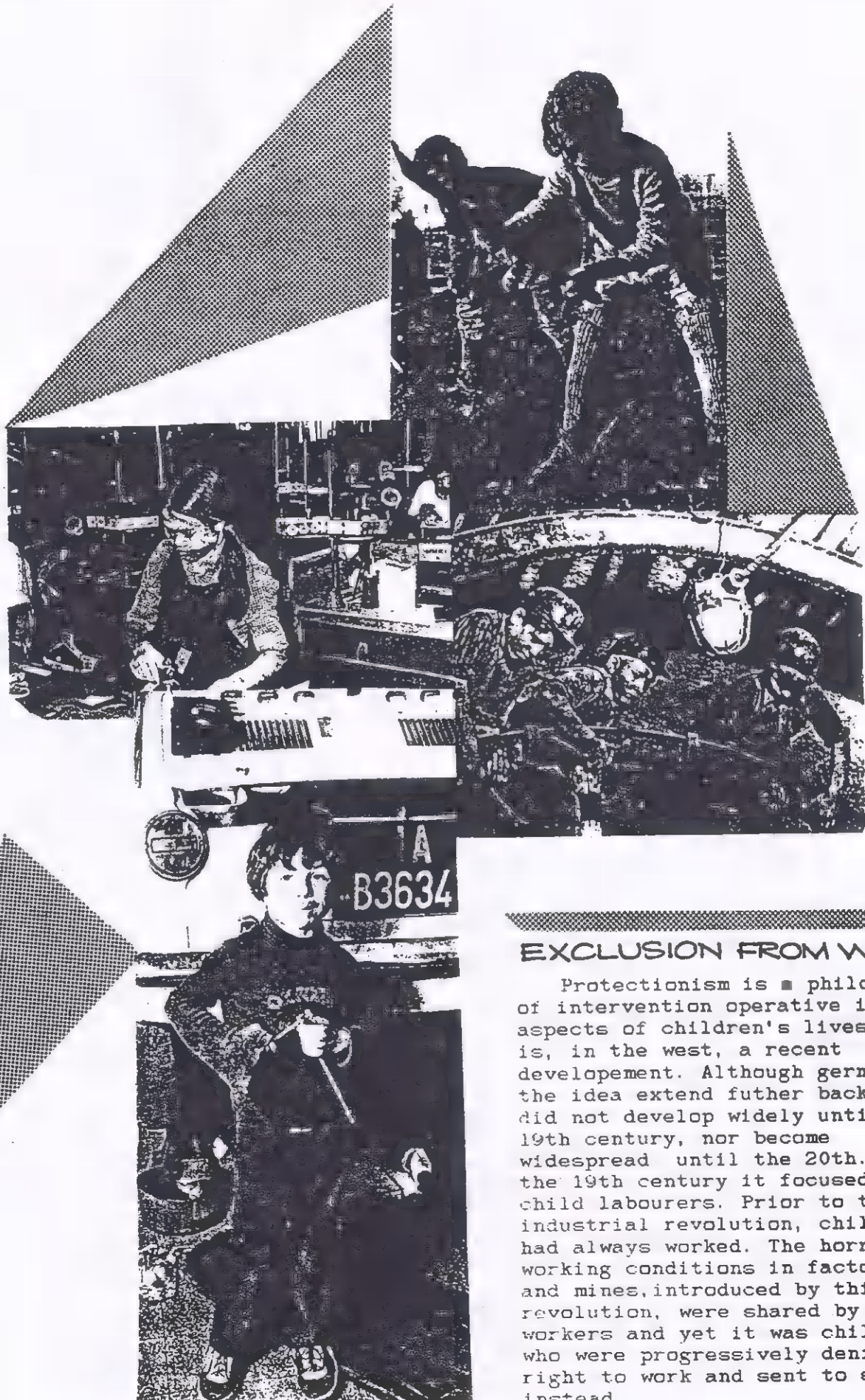
C. Turnbull on the Mbuti People

Over-14s 'need consent law change'
Pay protection to go for
500,000 young workers

ADULTS AS PROTECTORS

The idea that adults "know what is best" for young people and that young people must be protected is neither universal, nor historically constant. In many third world countries, where children's labour is essential to family survival, one doubts their ability to perform a variety of tasks and to be responsible. In Naples, you can see children as young as 6 working competently as painters, mechanics, etc. and zooming around on mopeds.

Is it their independence and self-reliance which is the 'problem' or their lack of resources and opportunities due to poverty race or gender? It is common for adults to equate children's independence with deprivation. Replacing autonomy, no matter how relative, with dependency, is not progressive, but it does satisfy adult needs to see children as helpless and needy. Is there an adult reading this who would deny that they feel gratified every time a child turns to them for help or protection, or asks for money, or permission to do something?



EXCLUSION FROM WORK

Protectionism is a philosophy of intervention operative in most aspects of children's lives. It is, in the west, a recent development. Although germs of the idea extend further back, it did not develop widely until the 19th century, nor become widespread until the 20th. In the 19th century it focused on child labourers. Prior to the industrial revolution, children had always worked. The horrific working conditions in factories and mines, introduced by this revolution, were shared by all workers and yet it was children who were progressively denied the right to work and sent to school instead.

The reasons for this are many, but central to this process, was the concept of the child which had been developing amongst the middle and upper classes for some time. Children were innocent, vulnerable and easily corruptible, so they needed to be sheltered from the evil world until they were old enough to resist its temptations. They were the "little angels in the house", a diversion for world weary fathers, and certainly had nothing to do with the dirty business of earning money.

This stereotypical Victorian view of children's 'nature' contrasted absurdly with the reality of working class children's experience: in factories, on the streets, in agricultural work, in the pornography and prostitution industries.

Nevertheless this view provided a rationale for the child protection movement and outlined the proper sphere of childhood. There was no question of improving working conditions and wages for children. Henceforth, men came to be seen as the principal breadwinners. Children belonged outside the work world: in the home, with women or at school in permanent tutelage.

PROTECTION VERSUS SELF RELIANCE

Protection is never neutral, disinterested or without negative consequences. Sheltering children from the work world has made them totally financially dependent on parents. The daily regime in school reproduces factory discipline. Their bodies, their time and their intellects are monitored by bells, confinement to desks, by exams, grades and punishments, and by teacher surveillance.

Angels have their problems

ROME: The Pope said yesterday that angels do exist but have been misunderstood throughout history.

Women jeer Leoni accused

Screaming members of the Child, the which is can return of the death ers. threw a police yesterday Gary Hopkins, a 27-year-old unemployed Bedford, in custody until Thursday by magistrates at Midsenhall, Suffolk, charged with the murder of three-year-old Leoni Keating in September.

Other institutions have arisen to contain those who do not adapt in home or school. With each outburst of rebellion, there is a cry for discipline, more specialists. With each new act of brutality against children, which comes to light in the press, there is a cry for more protection, more intervention. Is it not time, while keeping in mind the very real vulnerability of children in the current system, to call into question the idea of protection? To ask what has it achieved?

If by protecting children we are making them more dependent and vulnerable to exploitation, then this is not only counter-productive, but hypocritical. When adults think of protecting children, it is always against the danger "out there", against other adults since they themselves know "what is best". We seem incapable of realising that a protector can also be an abuser, a person who does not respect a child's integrity or wishes - in short, any adult, be they parent, teacher, stranger or youth worker.

Real protection is self protection. Adults need to work with children to confront dangers and problems, to examine what resources and rights children need in order to be stronger and more independent. And, adults need to look at how they benefit from children's dependency.

Old 'need protection by law like young'

DANGEROUS DESIRES

**Unique Patrol Breakdancing Group,
Donnille Lanig, Sharon Walton, Jean
Sutherland (all 16)**

We're not feminists, we're just level. We want to get other girls breakdancing and body popping and we came to this gig because it was all girls

Michelle Devitt 17

I'm a rapper, my stage name's Mistry MC of the Family Quest. I think Mrs Gillick is really out of order—if she wants to be a mother of ten that's up to her. She's got the money but some of us have no money and don't want to be tied down to kids. Girls mature at different ages—they know when the right time for sex comes. My mum encouraged me to get the Pill. If a girl enjoys casual sex and enjoys it, then that's alright.

A girl should have sex when she feels like it. No-one should force her. I know girls who wasn't thinking about having it, then she had sex in a very steady relationship and then he's there to help you if you get pregnant.

"I am very happy being a lesbian but I just wish that society would accept us and gay men. I mean, honestly, why do they think it's a crime to love someone? They think we spend 24 hours a day in bed. Why?" (Age 18)

A technique, developed in the US to help children combat sexual abuse, encourages them to say no to unwanted touching etc from adults. While in itself a good idea, it doesn't explore the very reasons why children don't say no in the first place or indeed how, for instance, a child can say no to their father or family friend. Nor does it raise the issue of children's desire, be it for other children, or for adults.

It is permissible to talk about sex with young children, when it concerns unwanted sex, but not to discuss their desires. Sexuality is perceived as dangerous for children, if they are or are seem to be at risk from 'predatory' adults, and yet disturbing, when they manifest interest in or curiosity about it. The sexuality of teenagers is particularly threatening: a force to be contained and channelled until the 'appropriate' time. Often adults talk as though teenagers need to be protected from their own desires.

I've never had sex but if I did and I told my mum I wouldn't be alive.

**Postman Pat halts
playhouse sex game**

And, particularly when having to cope with the sexual incidents, teachers resorted to diversion. One who became aware of five-year-olds simulating sexual intercourse on the Wendy House carpet, said briskly: "I hear kettle boiling." Another teacher, faced with the same situation, said she knocked the door and said: "It's Postman Pat. I've a letter for you."

Tracey Penning 14

I think it's stupid, if a girl wants to do something—sex, right—she should make up her own mind.

**Gillick case opens
in appeal to Lords**

MOTHERHOOD

In a short space, it's not possible to give motherhood a thorough examination, or to be particularly fair to mothers. But a pamphlet about children's oppression is not an attempt to present a 'balanced' view. Were a debate between adults and children to occur, it is, as usual, the adult voices which would predominate.

Women are without question the primary carers of children in our society. They bear the brunt of this responsibility and yet the resources and assistance available to them are pitiful. Mothering is a social concept; what is expected of 'good' mothers varies historically, culturally and between social classes. Since world war 2 there has been a proliferation of books on child development, psychology and care which cite the mother's role as crucially important. The majority of this literature has been written by male 'experts', who describe children and identify their 'needs', along with the role of mothers. Mothers are expected to respond to their child's every need be it emotional, physical or intellectual.

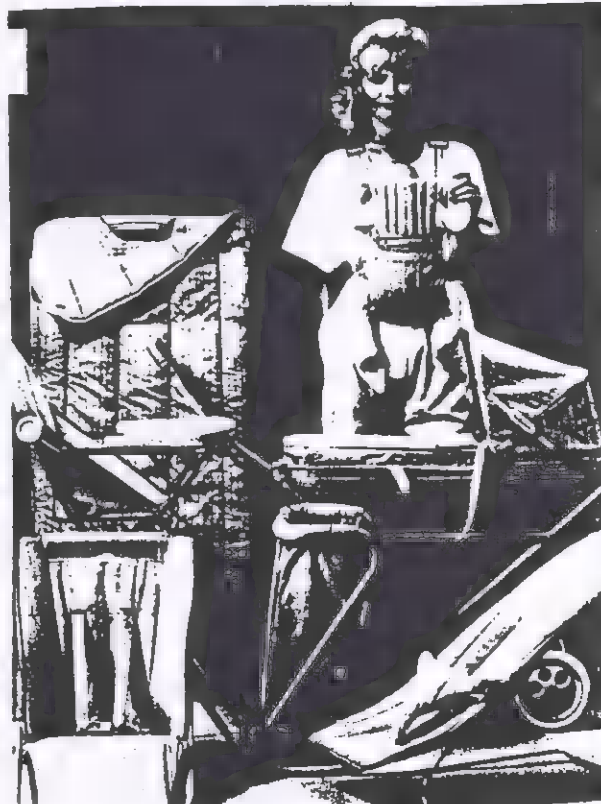
They are, in short, entrusted with their child's 'normal' development and suffer enormous guilt for any lapses or failures. The more needy and dependant the child, the more is expected from mothers, the more the terrain of motherhood expands. It is considered 'healthy' for a mother and child to have a virtually exclusive relationship during the child's early years.

Clearly, the greater children's autonomy, the less work for mothers. This can be witnessed where children have relationships with other adults, who are also 'responsible' for them, or where children have access to safe outdoor spaces. In societies where children work and care for younger children, they quickly become co-workers of mothers and fathers. It is only recently, in the west, that mothering has been conceived as full time job.



Endless mothering

THOUSANDS of mothers will wake today. Mothering Sunday. To gifts of posies, violets, breakfast in bed, and cards with messages.



Previously, other social tasks for women, such as farming, paid employment, cooking and sewing, to name a few occupied the bulk of her time. Children participated at their own level or later were occupied at some employment. None of which is meant to recommend a life of perpetual work, but to point out how varied can be the content of mothering.

ALTERNATIVES ?

None of which addresses the question of why women are overwhelmingly responsible for children, why family life is usually organised to produce absent fathers (either at work or simply not there), or why indeed the ideal home life is the nuclear family. Obviously, I do not have the space to address these issues here.

One of the demands of the women's movement has been for men to become more active in childcare in order to equalise the imbalance, and to place men in caring roles. The traditional role for fathers has been that of the distant authority figure, the 'head of household', exercising power over women as well as children. But, creating a new definition of fathering, which is analagous to mothering does not change the status of children within families or challenge the relationship between adults and children.

Mother
'took
blows
aimed
at baby'



This is also true of collective facilities such as day care centres and after school programmes. Improving and expanding this public sector, responds to women's legitimate need for paid employment and time to pursue their own interests. While they do facilitate contact between children and provide spaces outside the home, they do not, in the long term, counteract children's marginalisation, nor afford children more control over their lives.

When I worked in a parent cooperative day care, attempts by workers to integrate children into the decision making were perceived by some parents as productive of chaos, ie. children were not "learning anything". Later, while doing a survey of daycare policies, I asked other workers whether children had a voice in the running of their centres. To some, the question was simply incomprehensible or ridiculous. Some workers referred to the pedagogical guidelines of the centre. This was the only framework in which they could understand a question about children's role.

Despite the fact that women's role in child care is manifestly unfair, that very often, mothers have little say in what happens to children (eg. sending them to school, the social pressures to raise obedient children), women constitute the primary social controllers of children during the first 5 years of life. For ~~mother~~, motherhood is a site of power and for many the only site. From a child's perspective, mothers are powerful and can inflict pain, humiliation and denial. They also encourage 'good' behaviour and attempt to shape children in 'desirable' ways.

On the other hand the limitations of this power can be seen, when mothers fly in the face of convention, allow their children 'too much' freedom, or take their side in disputes with authorities. Mothers, particularly those who are working class, black, lesbian or belong to an ethnic minority, are often afraid their children will be taken away if their 'child-rearing' practices are unorthodox.

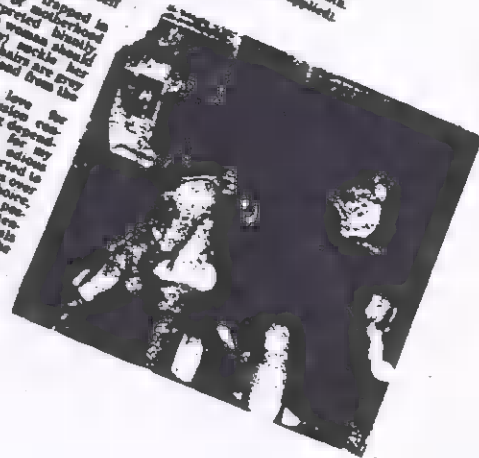
Hurd allows teenage mother to keep baby son with her in Holloway

As a single parent of two under-tens, I feel that parents, and mothers in particular, must be among the most oppressed groups in this society. But we get little publicity and this seems to be because of the physical difficulty of actually getting together to do anything when responsible for small children. For instance, although Landreth is said to have the largest proportion of single parents in the country, when I contacted British Gingerbread group I found they did not exist. As a result, a lot of single parents, such as myself, become isolated and start internalising their oppression—feeling it must be their fault if they are not perfect parents. I would like to suggest that as a step to help this situation, GPs should allow free advice to parents in the form of a column to meet like-minded people or organize groups. Jenny Almeida, Brockwell Park Estate, SW2.

LETTERS

I SYMPATHISE with Christine Morris (August 21) in grieving the loss of contact with her mother — but I do understand and agree with her mother's actions in breaking off these days. I don't think the ideology of motherhood which interpreted biologically that a woman should possess (1) their baby and (2) their baby are very different from the effort of mothering a performing dog. I don't see how it is for any parent of her? No, I don't think it is appropriate to be expected to make appropriate noises over baby's first toilet. Presumably, the promotion of Chinese and Japanese and Japanese are the pits? I cannot be the

stereotype man to admit. I am trying to be, but the distance is very great. It won't be long before I sell up and go to live by Cape Wrath where and where supplied.



LESBIAN MUMS RULE OK
♀ OK!

We can also qualify the extent of mothers' power with an awareness of women's oppression in patriarchal society, but this cannot be used to invalidate children's experience. Women and children are not inseparable; their needs and desires can be divergent, even conflicting. If children were to demand and gain more autonomy and choice, then many of the burdens of motherhood would disappear. However, such demands also challenge current notions of mothering, the exclusive nature of mother-child relationships, and women's power over children.

YAKETY-YAK : TALKING ABOUT CHILDREN

There's a lot which is said and written about children. It has the quality of speaking about someone who is not there, or worse, someone who is there, but has no voice. Looking at the subject catalogue in a library reveals the magnitude of this speaking about. Experts in a variety of fields have developed theories: psychology, pediatrics, education, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, criminology, linguistics, sociology and so on. The production of these treatises began in the last 300 years and increased dramatically in this century. Previously, writings about children concerned religious and moral instruction, advice on discipline and the appropriate relationship between parents/teachers and children. For example:

"Just as soon as children develop awareness, it is essential to demonstrate to them by word and deed that they must submit to the will of their parents. Obedience requires children to (1) willingly do as they are told, (2) willingly refrain from doing what is forbidden, and (3) accept the rules made for their sake."

J. Sulzer
(1791)

Such manuals are of course still being produced. Their approach varies from the overtly disciplinarian to the subtly manipulative, but the intent is similar; to mould children in a desired image.

PARENTING begins with that wonderful moment you first hold your baby in your arms.

It is then that the educational process starts that molds and shapes the child into what he or she will be in later life.

Make a mistake about it—the early months and years are the most critical in guiding and rearing of children. Here is how you can make the most of this vital period of time.

A parent should realize he or she has a host of advantages with which to succeed. Young children will unquestionably believe a parent. They have a strong desire to please parents who are truly interested and excited about their accomplishments.

"They open and close you,
And they act like they know you
They don't know you
They're friends and they're foes too"

Joni Mitchell

The manipulative skills of 4- and 5-year-olds need toys that stimulate their coordination and mental abilities.



Standards of Development

The effect of the theories is rather different. They propose to talk about what a child is: to observe, describe, dissect, to uncover processes of development, of interaction with the environment. They have also developed concepts of abnormality and deviancy, disorder and the exceptional. Not only do they suggest that there are truths about children which can be known, but they also establish these 'truths' as standards, as signposts of desirable behaviour.

The methods employed by researchers include for example: observation of children through one-way mirrors, without their knowledge, or engaging them in conversations, experiments, and activities from which 'knowledge' can be gleaned. How many researchers question current assumptions about children? Or consider the ethics of their methodology? Far from being neutral and objective, as the scientific approach claims, these inquiries are prescriptive and value-full. Imagine how novel it would be to read and hear children's thoughts and opinions not only about themselves, but about adults as well.

Each theory translates into corresponding practices and interventions in real childrens lives. These are based on assumptions about childrens' needs and capabilities, derived from the theoretical material. The writings of Jean Piaget, a child psychologist, have been adapted for use in nurseries and daycare centres. He is also taught in degree programmes for childcare workers. His ideas, for ex. on childrens' intellectual development are used to structure the activities and materials available to children who attend centres influenced by him. These and other institutions also provide facilities for more research into children's 'nature'. As well, the theories are popularized for consumption in the home, primarily by mothers.

The theories are often contradictory; what unites them is their treatment of children as objects of study, as creatures who can be known, thus categorized, thus treated 'appropriately'. They contribute not only to adult views of what constitutes a child, a young person, but also to children's self perception. A two year old engaged in an activity which is not 'developmentally appropriate', may be told she is "too young" or "too old" to do that, or subtly dissuaded from her efforts.

Children's answers clue to personality

'School sex education said it was perverted, that if your glands over-secrete then you're gay.'

'When at school sex education did not touch at all upon gays. There were leaflets and books available on social problems, drugs, abortion, contraceptives, VD, but nothing for gays.' (Male, 20)



'This is a job you will enjoy'. Dr John Gibben demonstrates 'directed development' exercises (1940). See 'Dummies'.

Words in their infancy

MY CLASS of eight-year-olds hadn't known the word "boche" so, after explaining and discussing it with them, I took the next obvious step. "What's the word for an

"A spatula!" essayed Stephanie, on whom a recent science lesson had not been entirely wasted.

"Not quite."

"A splinter," said Graham—always quicker to pick up a clue than to think about an answer.

Rosemarie's answer came, in an air of self-assurance, "A virgin," she concluded.

There's hope, Mr. Gillick—Yours faithfully,

Lee,
65 Station Road,
Polesworth,
Near Tamworth,
Staffs.

"all advice that pertains to raising children betrays more or less clearly the numerous variously clothed needs of the adult. Fulfillment of these needs not only discourages the child's development but actually prevents it. This also holds true when the adult is honestly convinced of acting in the child's best interests."

A. Miller



Teenagers are barred from seeing 'adult' movies because they contain sex, and cannot legally have heterosexual relationships before 16, yet many are taught sex education which comes from the experts i.e. sexologists and talks about them. The seemingly neutral terrain of science can disguise, not only bias, but also moral attitudes, especially prevalent in the sexual arena.

TOYS

Toys are often recommended for particular age groups eg. ■ puzzle for 2-3 year olds.

'Childrens' literature is also classified in this way. Imagine buying a book or record "recommended for those between 30-35 years of age". That would be absurd. We recognise that individual interests and capacities change with age, but these are only codified where children are concerned.

Toys have alot to say about children and to children. They are usually of no practical use, or shoddy non-functional imitations of the real thing. They have a potent ideological content: dolls, irons and dish sets for girls, space invaders and GI Joes for boys, and racist 'gollywog' images in books. Games are rich in cultural messages. Playing with monopoly money teaches the 'value' of money. Board and quiz games stimulate the spirit of competition. There are always winners and losers. War games encourage the acceptance of killing and 'necessary' military interventions.



bercht

I like going to school because it's so boring if you stay ■ home. But ■ classes should be made up of friends, even if they are all of different ages, you could split up into groups ■ some subjects.

I don't like dolls and when I get something like a doll's hair dryer all I like doing is taking the bottom off and getting the batteries ■ and things like that.

The real difference between boys and girls is that boys are just not cool.



Animals, stuffed or in plastic, are favoured toys for children: not to mention living animals who are given as 'pets'. Children learn from the very beginning, that animals are objects to be used, to satisfy human needs. Zoos are justified by their 'educational' value for children. Seeing uprooted animals in cages is, indeed, highly instructive and reminiscent of the cribs and 'playpens' in which small children are confined, of the fences surrounding school-yards, of the barred windows in borstals and mental institutions.

Of course, children often use toys in ways which they were not 'meant to be used'. They subvert the intentions of the makers. Toys are used once and then abandoned or broken. Children can suss out a con, as well as anyone. Toys for children, ■■ opposed to toys for just anybody, appear to serve not only ideological, 'instructive' aims, but also to circumscribe the arena of childhood activities. In effect, they are saying to children; concern yourself with the trivial, the futile, the irrelevant and wait till later for the real thing.

» School

"Many of those who don't do well in school, do very well in life" Keith Joseph.

School is the place where young people spend the bulk of their time. It is the primary institution of childhood. But it is only in this century that schooling has extended to the entire population, for a minimum of 10-11 years, in most western countries. School is the place where childhood is passed; ■ child over five years of age is ■ school-child, ■ student, ■ pupil. So close are these two identities that those who don't attend, as for instance many gypsy children, are seen as aberrations. What place can there be for them outside school? There is ■ disturbing feeling that such children are out of adult control, that their time is not being suitably organized for them, and they might "turn out badly".

Such attitudes reflect the acceptance of children's marginalization in school, ■■ being necessary and inevitable. Yet it has not been so very long since it was commonplace to see children in public places engaged in a variety of activities.

As I said earlier, schools are a very efficient way of monitoring and directing young people's energy and behavior. They spend long periods seated at desks, their attention focused on a single adult, unable to communicate with each other. They must ask permission even to pee. Bells dictate their movements, even their moments of 'liberty' are ordered precisely. Rank and grade predominate: sitting in rows, divided by age, classified by 'intelligence' and constantly being assessed by tests, exams and report cards.

What would you criticize about school - looking back?

You have to respect too many teachers which I don't think is right 'cos it makes them feel high and half the teachers ■■■■ you like shit anyway.

This then is the context in which 'learning' is to take place. Despite enormous public expenditure for education, ■■■ and more students are leaving school, barely literate. There have been swings between liberal and traditional approaches, and currently there are calls from many quarters for more discipline and rigor. There is ■ feeling that the more money spent, the better education will become. Where the system fails, it must be adjusted, improved. More and more 'problems' are identified: there are children with learning disabilities, those who are hyperactive, maladjusted, educationally subnormal, and under-achievers. And there are more specialists who intervene around these 'problems', more treatments which are developed, like drugs for the 'hyper-active'.

So much has been invested in the idea of school, psychologically as well ■■ economically, that it seems impossible to address the problem of schooling itself. Pre-school children have tremendous amounts of enthusiasm, learn a staggering amount, and acquire many skills. For them, the acquisition of basics like reading, writing and arithmetic should be neither problematic nor lengthy, given the motivation. And yet, it often is problematic, and absurdly time consuming.

Too Much Pressure

Dear LOOT

I wish to say how right you are Mr Famous. Too many pressures on us all. I know of an excellent remedy to make us all more human. Let there be less compulsory education. If no child ■■■■ forced to start school before 6 and every child had the option to ■■■■ 14, things would improve I am sure.

Mrs Briaco
Loughton

FORCE FED

What exactly do we mean by learning? Many people believe that if children were not 'forced to', they would learn nothing, be lazy and apathetic. This is, in fact, the model of the child or adult whose drive and curiosity have been crushed, rather than stimulated, by school and/or their home environment. Anyone who is or spends time with a young child, knows they need no stimulation.

But in school children must follow the adults agenda. They have no choice but to go, since it is compulsory, and practically no say about what, when or how they study. Tests and assess how well they can reproduce facts and ideas which may not interest them and with which they may disagree. In the classroom they must obey the teacher and compete with other students. How can this situation foster real debate and learning? No one can be 'taught how to think', or indeed needs to be. They can be given access to information and provided with a supportive atmosphere. They will do the thinking themselves.

TEACH YOURSELF



The numerous experimental schools such as Summerhill (established in England since 1923), of the late 19th and early 20th centuries have consistently discredited the belief that children must be forced to learn. There, children who had not done any formal lessons and decided to pass O or A level requirements were able to achieve this in as little as 2-3 years time.



Those who had not yet learned to read, but had developed a whole range of skills including the musical, mechanical, artistic and aesthetic, learned to read quickly when this became necessary to gain access to needed information.

What distinguishes many of these alternative schools, is not only the free choice of activity study and the absence of competition, but the experience of self-government and responsibility. At Summerhill, the school is run by a weekly General Assembly of students and teachers. Each person has one vote and the chairperson is normally a student; they range in age from 5-16. Practical decisions are taken, rules established, disagreements are aired and if necessary, punishments are decided upon.

This is hardly 'running wild'. Rather than waiting for adulthood to be responsible, they are doing it now. It is participation in one's community, in the decisions which affect one's life which fosters respect for collective decisions, for others and for one's own worth, not coercion and submission to other people's rules 'for your own good'.

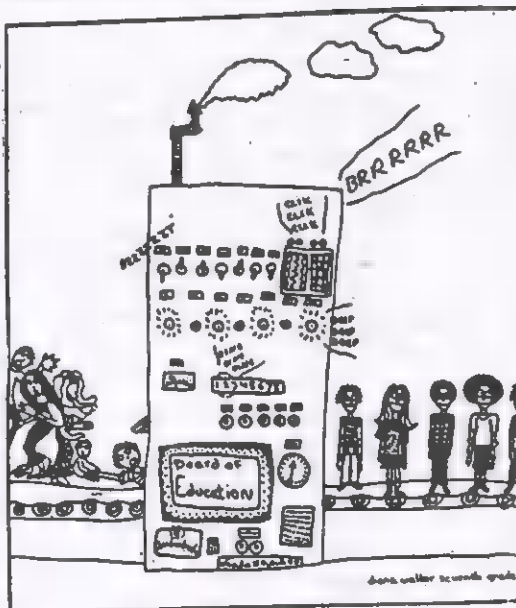
Violence hits the primary schools

by JUDITH JUDD, Education Correspondent

CHILDREN as young as four and five are taking part in a violence and disruption in primary schools, according to research carried out at London University's Gold-

DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH

The 'preparation for life' which takes place in schools is, unfortunately, just that. Young people acquire the attributes and skills necessary for the work place: acclimitization to routine, to physical restraint, the ability to take orders, the development of 'correct' thinking processes, the suppression of criticism and curiosity. The content of school curriculums is far from neutral or objective and conveys, in general, values which reflect and seek to maintain the status quo.



Boy hit by teacher awarded £700

Caning in schools gets a year's grace

By **Henke**,
Westminster Correspondent

Caning is to continue in Britain's schools for another year while head teachers decide on alternative punishments, the Department of Education announced yesterday. The decision comes after the Commons' vote on Tuesday by a majority of one to abolish corporal punishment.

Student councils in secondary schools are in fact supervised by adults, and promote a kind of sham democracy, not unlike that which exists in government. These councils have no significant say in the running of the school, because this would be unacceptable to the adults in charge. Parents are consulted, if minimally, and elect the educational boards, yet those who are most intimately concerned, the students, have no real voice, no power.

Students who don't conform, who rebel in different ways are subject to sanctions and punishments. Extra homework, detentions, suspensions, withdrawal of privileges are commonplace. Corporal punishment is still legal in this country; the sadistic belief that assault results in good behavior, that violence will curb violence, is still prevalent. (Sweden has, since 1979, outlawed all forms of corporal punishment, in homes as well as in schools). In addition, students can be subject to 'therapeutic' treatments from psychologists or psychiatrists, when they are thought to be maladjusted or suffering from some form of psychic disorder.

Of course, a sympathetic specialist or teacher can be receptive to children's problems without categorizing them. Never the less, treatment is usually intended to 'help the student adjust to the situation', not to change it. Students who are repeatedly disruptive, violent, 'unmanageable' or truant can be expelled. If no other school will accept them and their parents cannot cope, then alternative institutions will absorb them: borstals, children's homes, foster placements, psychiatric units.



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Steve Ball



REBEL WITH A CAUSE

Teenage rebellion is accepted by most people as natural and inevitable. Adolescence is seen as a time when new sexual desires and potency contribute to confusions, intense feelings and dissatisfactions. Teenage sexuality is a danger to be contained until teenagers are 'mature enough' to handle it appropriately. The age of consent is 16 for heterosexual relations and 21 for homosexual. But does puberty really explain the violence and self-destructiveness which are associated with adolescence?

The idea that youth must reject the older generation in order to assume its own identity promotes a view of society which is, of necessity, conflictual, which sees different age groups in an antagonistic relationship. Is it not possible that the rebellion of youth is a reflection of imposed dependencies and constraints, of a legitimate desire to be free from adult control? The contradictions of childhood become more intense as children grow older. The minor privileges and freedoms which they acquire as adolescents do not compensate for the limitations, lack of choice and economic dependency.

If society were to accept that school is not everyone's cup of tea, that family life is often antagonistic, that parents and children often do not get along, then new possibilities could emerge. The fact that school is compulsory means that, outside it, there is no provision for young people. Were they free to channel and utilize their own energies and ideas, this would have positive and creative consequences for everyone.

Technology school plan for young elite

'Put it this way. When you go to secondary school, right? you all start off like cattle . . . put into little groups and all that bullshit on your first day, and there's all this military type basis in school. And they shit the living daylights out of you your first time there.'

"Adolescents' 'heroic willingness' to fight one another in wars and (just as life is beginning!) to die for someone else's cause may be a result of the fact that during puberty the warded-off hatred from early childhood becomes re-intensified. Adolescents can divert this hatred from their parents if they are given a clear-cut enemy whom they are permitted to hate freely and with impunity."

A. Miller

The 'battle of the generations' is not inevitable: it is a reflection of grossly unequal relationships between adults and children, of unnecessary dependencies. If these are perpetuated they will only result in more violence and intergenerational conflict.

It is necessary to look at how social/ economic/ political/ environmental changes can empower children and relieve adults of onerous responsibilities. While this is not on the purpose of this pamphlet, we can look at how children themselves are struggling, contesting and what constitute some of their demands for change.





Children, young people, the world over, are involved in collective and individual acts of resistance, and struggles for change. They are not merely victims who suffer passively, but people who rebel, subvert and negotiate a space for themselves within their social positions as children. They are participants in many national liberation struggles, in campaigns concerning their own particular issues and in relationships with individual adults.

Where ever you find movements for national liberation, opposition to colonialism, dictatorship and facism, you will find children involved, from an early age. In the Spanish Civil War they were active and under Franco's regime the legal age of torture was 14. In Nicaragua, the majority of those killed in the fight to topple the Somoza dictatorship were under 20. In Algeria they were message carriers, decoys and ammunitions runners.

In Uganda, Eritrea, Guatemala and countless other places you will find them actively involved. In Chile last year a sit in by 500 school girls (aged upward from 8 years old) to protest against Pinochet, the dictator, resulted in their mass arrest, detainment and sexual harassment



Children in Santiago protest riot

From Malcolm Coad
in Santiago

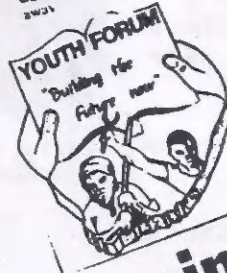
Hundreds of schoolchildren hurled stones at riot police and lit barriers of burning petrol in the streets of Santiago, in demonstrations to mark the murder a year ago of a teachers' leader and two other victims of a pro-government death squad.



"We have a funeral every weekend"
Pupils say one school for all

On 27 January, police broke up a meeting in Kagiso to discuss the education crisis; they killed 14-year-old Francinah Legwete and detained many others. But parents were not prepared to simply run away.

In Queenstown, students are not sure they need their school rebuilt. The white school in town is quite big enough for all the pupils of Queenstown, they say.



Youth organise against Kwanabe
"We are building the future now"

THE YOUTH in the Nutfield area Moutse played a key role in mobilising villagers, village youth organised themselves and had an IVV meeting in early December. A series of mass village meetings followed. People strongly rejected the imposition of Moutse, saying they will suffer more under Kwanabe.

The community was surprised they had never been told about these things before, and were happy to hear from the youth, an Unlough Youth Congress leader said.

By the time the Youth Congress

BUILDING a new society doesn't start after liberation. It starts with building a democratic people's organisation now.

That's the message from Youth Forum, the Natal-based youth coordinating structure. Their slogan is "Building the future now".

Youths challenge white farms

STREET committees and people's courts have spread right into the rural areas.

One village in Lesetole near Tzaneen has been divided into three sections, with street committees in each one.

Youth under the leadership of the Merakoma Youth Congress (Meyco) are the driving force behind the growing people's power in the village.

Meyco was formed last November, but the official launch was postponed because of detentions.

One of their aims is to look into the problems of their parents. Many of them are farmworkers—and their wages and working condi-

tions are terrible. "We saw it necessary to educate the parents to understand their exploitation by the bosses, the farmers," said a Meyco organiser.



On School Attendance in 86

This national consultative conference, having considered in detail the question of whether students of the oppressed and exploited people of South Africa should return to school and if so, under what conditions:

1. commends the students and their organisations for the principled and courageous manner in which they have conducted the struggle against racial, inferior and ethnic education;
2. salutes the heroic sacrifices made by our students throughout the country;
3. acknowledges that the boycott campaign has resulted in fundamental political, organisational and educational gains in spite of many problems experienced by students, and that it has also helped to raise the level of consciousness and organisation of other sectors of the oppressed and exploited people.

Leave the youth alone says chief

NO ONE MUST interfere with the business of the youth, says Chief Brown Malatji of Namagale in Palaburwa.

He says the SAP and SADF have shown disrespect by coming into his village without his consent, shooting and harassing people, and disrupting Namagale Youth Congress (Nayco) meetings.

In South Africa children and youth are at the very heart of the resistance. In 1976 in Soweto, their protest against the teaching of Afrikaans in their schools, erupted into mass protest against apartheid and thousands of children were killed. Today in South Africa they organize boycotts of schools, of white businesses. In Port Alfred they run street committees which replace the racist municipal organisation. When funerals take place it is they who run about to ensure maximum attendance. They display impressive discipline and organisational skills. Many children cannot return home because they are police targets and must effectively live underground.

Children in South Africa are detained, tortured and murdered because they are at the centre of the anti-apartheid movement, not because they are accidental victims of widespread police and army violence.

ON STRIKE

In the autumn of 1985 in Britain students organised a strike to protest against the slave-like conditions of Youth Training Scheme. The response of political leaders was predictably patronizing. Neil Kinnock, leader of the Labour Party offered scornful remarks, to the effect that thousands of students were being led by the nose, by a handful of labour militants.

Children have been active in the anti-nuclear and peace movements. The post-bomb generation must live with the the possibility of no future. The National Union of School Students has campaigned against corporal punishment and for student participation in the running of schools. The Lesbian and Gay Youth Movement has developed critiques of adult chauvanism; they recognise that sexual freedom for children and youth is conditional upon other changes in children's status. In Germany, a group called the Indianer Commune run by children and adults extends support to runaways and campaigns for a range of children's rights.

As well, there are many small, 'invisible' battles which children fight to preserve their integrity and challenge the limitations/restrictions placed upon their lives.



Labour's executive condemns
call for half-day stoppage

Kinnock rebukes 'dafties' behind striking pupils



White Flakes

Will there ever be the final Solitude?
that sound that numbs our ears, rings out
with bursts of light,
the sky is pink with the glowing death,
or is it our blood-drowned eyes
so weak, they sleep in our sockets
some dead.
The man on the wooden box, told us
we would survive;
we listened to this last stranger in
pathetic obedience.

The hours are long gone,
the flash was a blood stain
that dripped for a moment;
and now it's beginning to snow
white flakes,
but it burns.

Anthony King

Heart they have not

Mr MacGregor can't you see
That we're not so greedy
All we want is to save our pit
But you won't give in just one little bit
You take our food you take our money
While you sit at No 10 drinking champagne and eating honey.
Christmas is near but we've no fear
We'll last out the good new year
Maggie sends out her boys in blue
While our pickets stand steady and true
The blue stormtroopers carry on
We'll fight and clash and stand to the last
Until the pickets are stopped being harassed.

Jason Stewart, 7, Yorkshire



"My little sister had opted for the armed struggle; she was 8 when she joined the guerrillas."

R. Menchú

CHILDREN IN CHARGE

For adults who wish to work with children in order to question and change the conditions of children's lives, many contradictions arise. Individual adults cannot divest themselves of the social and economic power which adulthood confers on them. It cannot be wished away. It is essential for them to respect the need for children to organise independently, to make their own decisions.

Because of the legal and economic disadvantages which children suffer, adults can be useful in providing support and resources in these areas. Adults must not speak in the place of children. But conflicts are inevitable. Adults can also work at deconstructing and uncovering their own childhood experiences, as well as challenging the attitudes and behaviour of other adults. Breaking down the categories of child and adult is a useful strategy for change.

My Powered Chair

The first time that I got my powered chair home, I could not believe it. When I brought the powered chair up the road one of my friends said, 'This is the first time that I don't have to wheel your wheelchair up and down the road in ten years.' I felt funny when she said that. I am able to bring myself to the shop with the powered chair.

We need to envision a whole array of strategies which will empower children, which will afford a new basis for relationships between adults and children. Equality could incorporate difference rather than the insistence we all be the same before we can have access to the same rights and considerations. Here are some beginnings:

MEDIA ADULTERATION

The media normally distorts children's activities and protests. Youth must be seen as helpless and impressionable; the common assumption is that they have been influenced, even brain-washed by adults. This was seen clearly in last year's students strike and is always suggested when children are involved in militant armed resistance.



Many Guatemalan Indian children who have witnessed the torture and death of family and community members, decide to join the guerrillas fighting the dictatorship. It is the experience of brutality and injustice which has brought about their commitment to combat the violence. Yet western journalists in this and countless other situations speculate about the psychological effects on children who take up arms. They seem to prefer that children suffer the trauma as passive victims rather than respond actively. Again it is the image of the active, self-motivated child which is threatening.

